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FOR CONSUMERS
from the Office of Consumer Affairs

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JUDITH CONNOR, NEW ASSISTANT SECRETARY, DISCUSSES CONSUMER INVOLVEMENT AT DOT

Judith T. Connor was sworn in on October 24, 1975, as DOT's Assistant Secretary for Environment, Safety, and Consumer Affairs. Mrs. Connor succeeded General Benjamin O. Davis, Jr., who retired in September.

Since 1973, Mrs. Connor had been with DOT's Urban Mass Transportation Administration (UMTA) as Special Assistant to the Administrator, as Acting Administrator, and as Acting Deputy Administrator. Prior to that, she served with the Department of Commerce and with the Office of Economic Opportunity, and worked in private industry with Trans World Airlines and the Pacific Telephone Company

To introduce Mrs. Connor to readers of Transportation Topics, *we present the following interview with her, recorded on December 31, 1975.*

Judith T. Connor
Assistant Secretary for Environment, Safety, and Consumer Affairs

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Q. Do you bring with you, as a result of your experiences with UMTA, any particular commitment to developing more consumer interest in transportation issues?

A. I do, in that I believe I have a greater sensitivity to what the major modal problems are, having been in a modal administration like UMTA.

There are two sides to the coin: One, I can see that the mode must reach out and determine what are the consumers' needs and must think constantly in those terms both in operating services and in designing technology. But it is difficult for modes to get that activity really moving because of all their other administrative priorities. So I think our area of commitment here should be to help the modes accomplish things that their own staffs may not be able to do alone.

Q. What approach can we take to help the modes?

A. We shouldn't just be monitoring their efforts to assess consumers' needs. We should be actively helping them to reach out to consum-

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SECRETARY COLEMAN RELEASES TRANSPORTATION POLICY STATEMENT

Secretary of Transportation William T. Coleman, Jr., has delivered to Congress a *Statement of National Transportation Policy* which sets out the broad policy considerations that should underlie a national transportation policy.

Issuing the document as a statement of policy intent and a clarification of Federal responsibility, the Secretary invited public criticism. Consumers' comments, he pointed out, should constitute an important contribution in the development of the Nation's transportation system.

Among the key policies outlined in the statement are two basic doctrines:

- A dynamic, competitive, and efficient private sector should meet the Nation's transportation needs to the maximum extent feasible.
- Federal resources are finite and must be expended for transportation purposes that serve national interests, with appropriate State and local participation in financing and decisionmaking.

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DOT OFFERS CONSUMER REPRESENTATION PLAN TO INCREASE CONSUMER INVOLVEMENT

In response to President Ford's directive of April 1975 asking all Executive departments to improve their processes for involving consumers in decisionmaking, the Department of Transportation published its Proposed Consumer Representation Plan in the *Federal Register*, November 26, 1975.

DOT's Office of Consumer Affairs is seeking comments on the proposed plan, which was mailed to all *Transportation Topics* subscribers in December. Comments will be accepted until March 1, 1976, and should be mailed to Ann Uccello, Director, Office of Consumer Affairs, DOT, Washington, D. C. 20590.

As part of the effort to stimulate comments on the Proposed Consumer Representation Plans of all Federal Executive agencies, nine regional White House Conferences were held during January. All were open to the public. DOT's Consumer Representation Plan was discussed at the conferences held in Kansas City (Missouri), Philadelphia, and Los Angeles.

Final White House conferences on the plans are presently slated to be held in Washington, DC, during the last two weeks in February; all will be open to the public. DOT's plan is scheduled to be discussed on February 24 at meetings to be held in Room 2230, Department of Transportation, 400 Seventh Street, SW, Washington, DC 20590.

All final Consumer Representation Plans, including DOT's, will be published later this spring.

NEW DOT RULES

To keep you up to date on new DOT rules and notices of special concern to consumers, *Transportation Topics* presents these summaries of selected final actions:

- National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) motor vehicle standards issued January 26, 1976, are designed to improve the safety of an estimated 35,000 school buses manufactured annually for use by nearly 20,000 school districts. The standards involve emergency exits, body joint strength, rollover protection, and seating; all were mandated by Congress under terms of the Motor Vehicle and Schoolbus Safety Amendment of 1974. They will be effective nine months after adoption, and are supplemented by two recent amendments to existing safety standards on fuel system integrity and braking. A proposal for seat belt anchorages in school buses over 10,000 pounds gross vehicle weight rating was withdrawn.

- A National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) regulation issued September 10, 1975, will expedite handling of public petitions requesting new rulemaking or vehicle recall actions. The regulation will simplify the task of identifying these requests. Each petition must be written in English, carry a heading which includes the word "Petition," be addressed to the NHTSA Administrator, and contain the reason for the request. NHTSA will conduct a technical review of each petition.

Coleman Releases Policy Statement

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The Statement applied these policy principles to current Department of Transportation concerns involving the automobile, urban transportation, highways, waterways, rail freight service, rail passenger service, and aviation. A summary of highlights follows.

The automobile: This is the most flexible, mobile, and responsive form of transportation. Improvements are needed in the auto's energy use, safety, environmental soundness, and its intelligent and socially responsible use through better traffic management practices, particularly in urban areas.

Urban transportation: Effective metropolitan-wide planning is necessary to meet Federal priorities in: air quality and noise pollution control; the preservation of historic buildings, parks, and recreational lands; accessible transportation for all citizens; and national land-use development.

Highways: Interstate commerce and national security require that a high level of performance be maintained on major highway systems. Completion of the Interstate System is a top priority.

Waterways: Water transportation is energy-efficient and cost-effective. However, a system of user charges should be initiated.

Rail freight service: Prompt short-term Federal action is needed to aid in the development and modernization of a nationwide, privately-owned interstate rail freight system.

Rail passenger service: There is strong Federal interest in determining whether Amtrak, without Federal subsidy, can compete with other passenger modes. A policy decision must be made as to whether national priorities justify long-term Federal subsidy.

Aviation: Our policy includes maintaining the excellent safety record, reforming the air regulatory structure fostering more efficient use of fuel, strengthening the financial viability of well-managed carriers, and improving airport planning, including environment protection.

HERE ARE DOT'S CONSUMER CONTACTS

DOT has announced the first concrete result of the Department's Proposed Consumer Representation Plan (see page 2).

In response to the Plan's directive that each operating administration should have an identifiable consumer affairs focal point, three new consumer officers have been named by the Federal Railroad Administration, the Federal Highway Administration, and the U.S. Coast Guard. Previously, only the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration and the Federal Aviation Administration maintained consumer officers.

The five consumer affairs contacts in operating administrations are:

- Fred Pelzman, Chief, Community and Consumer Liaison Division, Federal Aviation Administration, Washington, DC 20591, phone—202/426-1960.
- W. Lee Mertz, Associate Administrator for Planning, Federal Highway Administration, Washington, DC 20590; phone—202/426-0585.
- Beverly Silverberg, Public Information Specialist, Office of Public Affairs, Federal Railroad Administration, Washington, DC 20590; phone—202/426-0881.
- Gilbert Watson, Chief, Consumer Services, Office of Public Affairs and Consumer Services, National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, Washington, DC 20590; phone—202/426-0670.
- Captain Merrill Wood, Chief, Information and Administrative Staff, Office of Boating Safety, U.S. Coast Guard, Washington, DC 20590; phone—202/426-1080.

In addition, DOT's Office of Consumer Affairs—established in 1971—is responsible for Departmentwide programs and issues that cut across the operating administrations. Contact:

- Ann Uccello, Director, Office of Consumer Affairs, Office of the Secretary of Transportation, Washington, DC 20590; phone—202/426-4518.

ENERGY SAVING TIP *Does your car need an oil change? Refill with the lowest SAE number recommended by the manufacturer. Remember that heavy oil tends to increase friction and decrease fuel economy.*

ENERGY SAVING TIP *If you're planning a late-winter or early-spring vacation, save energy at home. Before you leave on vacation, lower the thermostat to 50 degrees . . . empty and unplug your refrigerator . . . shut off or dial down your water heater.*

AUTO HOTLINE IS OPEN NOW

800-424-0123. That's the toll-free number for the auto safety Hotline recently set up by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA).

You can use the number to report or ask about auto safety defects if you live anywhere in these states: Maryland, Virginia, West Virginia, North Carolina, Delaware, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Connecticut. The Hotline is also available to New York residents living in New York City, Long Island, and Buffalo, and to Ohio residents whose telephones have the area code 513 and 614.

The experimental Hotline will be evaluated after one full year of operation. NHTSA will then determine whether to establish a national toll-free Hotline.

800-424-0123

U. S. Coast Guard Photo

Members of DOT's Citizens' Advisory Committee on Transportation Quality are briefed on air traffic control procedures at San Francisco International Airport during meeting on airport noise policy. Their recommendations urged DOT to set flexible minimum standards for airport noise with airport operators responsible for planning and implementing local compliance. Their recommendations also called for FAA to prevent inappropriate land use, zoning, and development in areas affected by airport noise.

"BIKECENTENNIAL '76" PLANS BICYCLE TOURS FOR BICENTENNIAL YEAR VACATIONS

by Marie Birnbaum

Interested in getting to know the U.S. by bicycle this summer? If so, you may want to investigate *"Bikecentennial '76"*, which is offering local bicycle trips as well as coast-to-coast tours on a newly developed trans-America trail.

Bikecentennial '76, a program created by a private organization, is recognized by the American Revolution Bicentennial Administration and is endorsed by DOT.

The bicycling program offers a variety of organized group tours for this spring and summer—starting with 12-day local trips and ranging up to 82-day coast-to-coast tours. The trans-America trail will parallel or cross many historic trails, including the Oregon Trail, the Santa Fe Trail, and the Chisholm Trail. Trips will originate at 13 sites which have been designated as trail heads. Each trail head will be accessible by bus, train, or plane.

The two basic types of trips are the camping trip and the bike-inn trip. The bike-inn will offer a hosteling experience with sheltered accommodations in such places as gymanisums, church basements, and school dormitories. Special services available will include some equipment shuttles and child-care vans which will permit children to pedal for part of each day and to be driven for the rest of the day. In addition, special arrangements can be made for motel accommodations.

Basic costs for the organized trips (including food) will vary from about $140 to $965, depending on the length of the trip. There will be extra fees for special services. Group trips will be accompanied by a leader trained to deal with bicycle mechanics, first aid, and group dynamics. Everyone registering for a group trip will attend a one-day orientation session designed to check out both riders and bicycles.

Independent trips can also be arranged at a minimum cost of $40. Registrants will receive health and accident insurance as well as guidebooks and maps.

Readers who want information about a *Bikecentennial '76* vacation may send requests (with a stamped, self-addressed 9" x 4" envelope) to:

Bikecentennial
P.O. Box 1034
Missoula, MT 59801

More than 1,000 riders have already registered with Bikecentennial and current projections estimate as many as 10,000 riders during 1976. Reservations for cross-country trips must be made and paid for by April 15, 1976.

The trans-America trail has been carefully routed on existing backroads and passes through or near vast stretches of wilderness area, primitive land, National Prairies, grasslands, and desert. It also includes settled rural regions of the Ozarks, Kentucky bluegrass country, and colonial Virginia. Present plans call for the route to have *Bikecentennial '76* signs posted along lightly traveled roads in Oregon, Idaho, Montana, Wyoming, Colorado,

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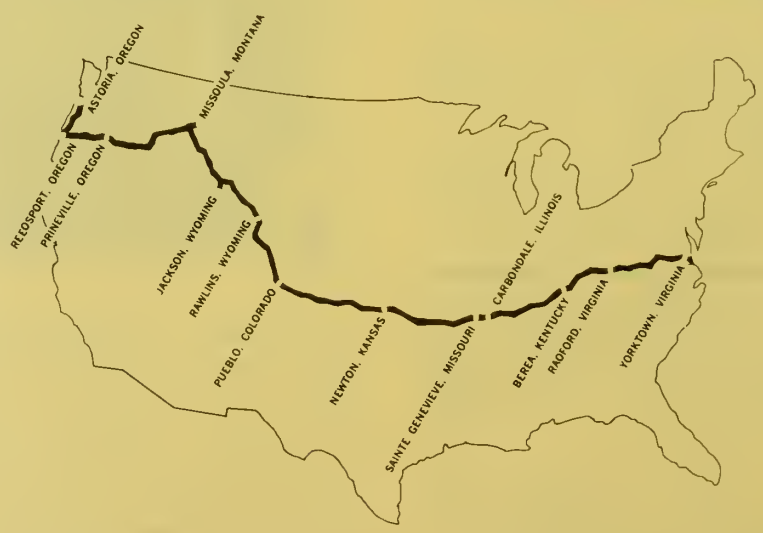

Map shows 13 trail heads, sites where Bikecentennial '76 tours will originate. The cross-country trips will start on both east and west coasts (at Reedsport and at Yorktown) and will cover the entire trans-America trail, touching base at all 13 of the trail heads. Local trips run from one trail head to another, looping through the surrounding countryside.

NHTSA OFFERS FREE CAR TESTS

Car owners lucky enough to live in a few selected areas have recently been getting free diagnoses of their autos' state of health, thanks to a National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) demonstration project.

You can get the same service if you live near one of the sites in Alabama, Arizona, Tennessee, Puerto Rico, or Washington, DC, where experimental diagnostic centers have been set up.

Purpose of the pilot program is to evaluate diagnostic inspection procedures, in order to aid State inspection facilities. The demonstration projects were mandated by Congress, in the Motor Vehicle Information and Cost Savings Act of 1973. Supported largely by NHTSA funds—with some additional funds from States—the centers will stay in business until June 30, 1976. After that, States may retain the diagnostic equipment if they wish.

At each center, an owner's car is subjected to 180 specific tests. The most significant tests evaluate brakes, front end alignment, lights, tires and wheels, and emissions. After testing, each car owner is given a written report. Under the terms of the demonstration project, the centers divide clients into two groups and give a different type of report to each group. One group receives a report with complete diagnostic information; the other receives only "pass-fail" information for each item tested.

After the centers close, the program and its cost-effectiveness will be evaluated and summed up in a report that NHTSA will send to Congress.

For car owners, the advantages of diagnostic testing are threefold: (1) A diagnosis can identify the cause for a specific symptom that the car is demonstrating; this allows the owner to take his car to a mechanic and give specific orders concerning what work must be done. (2) After repair work has been done, a second diagnosis will indicate whether the mechanic has done his work properly. (3) A diagnostic test is useful preventive medicine for any car, since it can indicate whether the auto is in excellent running condition or whether trouble may be brewing.

Addresses of the eight experimental diagnostic centers operating under the NHTSA program are:

Alabama

- University of Alabama Campus, Huntsville

Arizona

- 600 North 40th St., Phoenix
- 4040 East 29th St., Tucson

District of Columbia

- 1001 Half Street, S. W., Washington, DC

Puerto Rico

- Old Navy Base, San Juan
- Route 2, Bayamon
- Route 2, Ponce (near Regional Transportation Building)

Tennessee

- Amnicola Highway, near Police Services Center, Chattanooga

[Initial research for this feature was done by Larry Bruno, DOT Management Intern.]

"Bikecentennial '76" Plans Bicycle Tours

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Kansas, Missouri, Illinois, Kentucky, and Virginia.

Bikecentennial '76 was created to unite the celebration of the introduction of bicycling to America and the founding of the Nation. It was in 1876 at the Philadelphia site of America's centennial celebration that a British display of the bicycle caught the eye of one Colonel Pope. Colonel Pope went on to found the sport and industry of bicycling in America. Thus, 1976 is a centennial for bicycling as well as a Bicentennial for the Nation.

Bikecentennial '76 planning has been under way for several years. The word "bikecentennial" was coined by June Siple, a member of the Hemistour Alaska to Argentina bicycle expedition. Her husband, Greg Siple, had earlier described a plan for a cross-continent Bicentennial event for bicyclists. The Hemistour group discussed the idea in detail for the first time during a lunch stop in Chocolate, Mexico. Discussion continued throughout the day. Omen of all omens appeared that evening when the only cyclometer in the group was checked for the trip log. Purely by chance, it registered "1776."

In a statement to the Bikecentennial organization, former Secretary of Transportation Claude S. Brinegar stated, "We are very enthusiastic about the concept of a transcontinental bikeway as a Bicentennial project and feel that this project would provide a unique opportunity for foreign visitors and Americans to meet and travel in many quiet and beautiful areas of the country."

Marie Birnbaum is a Program Coordinator in the Office of Environmental Affairs.

Judith Connor, New Assistant Secretary, Discusses Consumer Involvement at DOT
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ers, to build that assessment effort into their own system of thinking and their system of operating. We should provide them with the expertise they may not have themselves.

Q. Can consumers help in this regard?

A. Individual consumers should become aware of the working organizations throughout the Department. They should be outspoken about having their views heard by the Departmental organizations that deal with the consumer, not least of which is the Departmental Office of Consumer Affairs. Their opinions are important and they should be aggressive about providing them to us.

Q. Do you think the Department can do a better job of monitoring consumers' comments and inquiries?

A. We should be using the mail system to determine what are the consumer's priorities, what are the areas of most aggravation or frustration. I am not convinced that we're doing that as well as we could. I think it is done well when there is a specific issue in front of us. But as to a general statement summing up the consumer's most important concern or second most important concern, we don't assess that on a regular basis as well as we could.

Also, there is a whole area of regulatory activity where we could be working much more aggressively to understand consumers' attitudes toward our regulations, in advance of actually putting the regulations out. I think we are far ahead of many departments. But we could be doing more in terms of getting consumers' views.

That applies also to legislative efforts.

Q. You're suggesting that DOT should seek consumer comments before developing proposed legislation?

A. Yes, I think that we have on occasion proposed legislation and have subsequently been surprised when we started getting feedback, not just from the affected industry, but from people who would be users of the service and who had some very firm views on whether the proposed legislation was good or bad. I think that we could have done a better job of determining, in advance, what that response would be.

We should be trying to identify who is going to be impacted by legislation. In the course of developing a proposal, we should assess what various views may develop around the legislation.

Q. You're thinking, then, of developing the Department's legislative proposals with an approach similar to the method we often use for rulemaking—putting out an advance notice asking for public comment?

A. Well, not necessarily a formal notice, but a more systematic effort to assess the reactions of affected parties before the legislative proposal is set in concrete.

Very often, I think, a legislative proposal is developed with one group or one organization or one basic objective in mind. Then we discover, after the fact, that there is a whole variety of people who are affected by the proposal and sometimes that discovery itself defeats the proposal.

We could do a better job of developing the proposal after we have made a conscious, systematic effort to touch base with all the parties concerned with the legislative proposal and integrate that data into the development.

I wouldn't be so naive as to think that we're always going to be able to make everybody happy. But we would at least be able to understand what all the needs are.

Q. Are we ready for the long-range planning that would be required for consumer involvement in legislative proposals?

A. I'm not sure that at the present time it would be a first priority. Of course, our first priority is to fully implement the initiatives in our Consumer Representation Plan.

I think now we should develop much more systematic consumer involvement around the advance notice of proposed rulemaking. When we get that ready, then we move on to another item, such as the legislative proposal.

Q. And what about the consumer services offered by the Department? Are there specific areas where you feel we have not moved with the thrust that we should?

A. I am concerned that information from the consumer is not as systematic as it should be. I'd like to see us develop a means that is clearly comprehended by consumer groups and individual consumers for reaching into the Department to express their concern. I'm not sure that that process is mature. What I mean by maturity is that the system runs smoothly and everybody, both outside and inside the Department, knows where it operates and how to work with it. I don't think that we have reached that point, so we need to work more on that.

Most important, perhaps, is a central focus

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Connor Interview

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in each mode, with an individual specifically charged with responsibility for hearing what the consumer has to say and for responding.

Q. Now that we have that mechanism, as a result of the DOT Consumer Representation Plan, don't you expect that the procedure will follow?

A. We have identified the people who are the consumer officers, we know what we want them to do. Now we need to go the next step and make sure that the consumer representation in each of the modes is an active one and that people can identify with them and contact them and deal with them.

Q. You hope to see consumers making more frequent contacts with our consumer officers?

A. Absolutely. We need more information from consumers to make better decisions. And consumers need more information about our decisions.

We do need to make more and more of an effort to explain to people why we have come to the conclusions we reach. The Secretary is demonstrating that he, personally, does that and I think we are extraordinarily fortunate to have a Secretary who is committed to this course. For instance, with his decision on Interstate Route 66 here in the Washington area, he sent out a long statement about how and why he had come to that conclusion. His decision on the Concorde is going to be another example of his willingness to lay out the reasons why he has come to certain conclusions.

Q. You believe that the public wants and should have such reasons?

A. My own sense is that you can't always do what people want you to do. But it is my experience that it helps if you can sit down with a person who is unhappy with your decision and explain why, from our standpoint, it couldn't have been made in his favor. It doesn't satisfy but it helps him understand what is going on in the Federal Government.

And I think that what causes so much frustration is that people sometimes believe they can't reach us and they can't talk to us, and we are making decisions without any contact with the public at all. I think that we can help alleviate that by at least demonstrating a concern to hear everybody. Of course, not all consumers hold the same views on a single subject. In fact, it is more often the case that views are opposing. It is our job to balance these views and to take them all into consideration during decisionmaking.

I can give you an example. I met several days ago with some people from a major city who are greatly concerned about the building of a subway and how it affects their community. They felt very strongly that they had not had a chance to provide their comments on the environmental impact statement, the EIS.

Now, after having met with them, reviewed the EIS, and talked with affected mode and local elected officials, we have decided that the EIS is adequate and that the concerns those citizens expressed, while legitimate, were adequately considered during the planning process.

Q. Then that group didn't get what it wanted?

A. No, but I hope that they will understand that given an extremely complex decision, they were heard and their views were given serious consideration.

Also, this experience has made us realize that we need to pay much more attention to public hearings on the design and building of subway systems. Maybe the procedure should be similar to FHWA's two-step process for highway hearings.

With highways, the first public hearing is held during the stage of preliminary planning. Then another public hearing takes place after engineering and design work has been accomplished, when you actually know what the precise impacts of the highway are going to be.

We have not had that kind of two-step process in the development of subway systems; I am beginning to feel that we need it.

Q. So, as a result of that citizen involvement, there may be a change in the Federal procedure?

A. That's right. This experience suggests that there is a flaw in the Federal process, that we should be thinking about improving the citizen's opportunity for commenting on subway development.

Another aspect of this case is that we do have to rely on the local process and local elected officials to reflect the public view. And I think that's legitimate. It is the basis of our political system. In this case, the public officials have been reflecting a different point of view from the citizens' group that spoke with us.

The Federal Government would be in a state of disarray if we did not look to local officials to give us some guidance. We just

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can't sit here in Washington and make precise decisions about the impact on specific communities without looking to the representatives of those communities.

Q. There was a conflict, in this case, between the officials' position and the citizens' position?

A. I think that the problem from this consumer group's point of view was that they believed their own elected officials were not paying sufficient attention to them. And there really isn't much at the Federal level—if their local politics are not working for them—there is not much we can do about it.

As I indicated to this particular group, maybe the time frame is all wrong given what they wanted to accomplish, but the only thing they can do is elect somebody else. And I don't think we should be interfering with that process at the local level. We need a lot of guidance here in Washington from local politicians. That's what the political system is all about as far as I'm concerned. On the one hand, it's necessary to have a mechanism to receive consumer views in the Federal Executive branch; but on the other hand, there is no question in my mind that such views must be supplemented with the views of local elected officials.

Q. Could you elaborate on your comment about having a mechanism to receive consumer views?

A. Let me go back to the concept I mentioned before, of developing a more systematic approach to consumer mail. That's where we can supply a higher quality of response, to be sure that the Department is responsive to all consumer concerns. And then we need to pay attention to what is being said in those letters.

Q. You are saying that we can improve our understanding of consumers' needs if we track their letters more systematically?

A. My experience at UMTA would tend to suggest that is the case. I used to handle the overall mail function in the Administrator's office and it was amazing how many people would write to the Urban Mass Transportation Administration with ideas for new automobiles, better buses, or design of subways. But we don't really keep a tally of those kinds of comments.

For example, consider references to the use of the automobile. The number of letters that are sent in to UMTA suggesting that there should be more buses on the road and fewer automobiles is tremendous. And yet there is no efficient tracking of that as a measure of public opinion. Now maybe over at FHWA they're getting as many letters about utilization of the automobile and getting the buses off the road.

But I don't believe we're keeping a tally of these issues. I want to see us improve our record in this regard.

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